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ABSTRACT

This study considers the effects of ability, attitude, and pressure on army writing. A survey questionnaire was designed on the basis of a review of the literature on causes of organizational writing problems; this was administered to 168 army officers attending the Army Command and General Staff College. An entire class at the Command and General Staff College was also tested with a standardized English composition examination. The testing indicated that army officers were, as a group, average writers, although a significant number (18.5%) were below national minimum writing standards. The causes of writing difficulties were found to be a complex combination of educational deficiencies, neutral attitudes toward writing, rather than positive ones, and inadequate management practices, leading to doubt and confusion about writing objectives. (Author/AA)

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THE CAUSES OF WRITING PROBLEMS

IN THE ARMY

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Military writing has been criticized for being stilted, verbose, and ambiguous; such poor writing is pejoratively called "pentagonese" or "militarese." The army has made numerous attempts to improve its written communications because it recognizes that its writing problems cause loss of money and manhours as well as critical delays and confusion. However, those attempted solutions did not follow from a comprehensive study of the causes of the problems. This study identifies the causes of the writing problems of army officers.

The thesis considers the effects of ability, attitude, and pressures on army writing. First, it seeks to determine whether the problems are caused by a basic lack of writing ability in the officer corps. The study then attempts to understand if the source of that cause lies in the education, either civilian or military, of the officer or if it is due to a lack of opportunity to acquire necessary writing experience in the early stages of a military career. The attitudes of the military profession are also analyzed to determine the general writing preferences and aversions of army officers and to consider whether the military evaluation system reinforces positive writing attitudes. Finally, the various pressures which might adversely affect organizational writing are examined to determine if they are operating within the military organization. These pressures are categorized as environmental, managerial, or personal, depending on their source. Such a comprehensive study of ability, attitude, and pressures within the military profession should provide an insight into the causes of poor army writing.

Three research methods are used to discover all the causal factors: literature research, survey, and testing. Based on the assumption that many of the military's writing difficulties are similar to those in any large organization, the literature research seeks to understand the causes of organizational writing problems from the works of authorities in the fields of business communications and organizational psychology. It also considers the general writing situation throughout American society, since the army officer is a product of the academic institutions of that society and many of his writing habits are formed by the societal communication practices. The findings from the literature research are empirically tested for relevance to the military situation by a survey of 168 army officers attending the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. In addition, the survey tests the various causes hypothesized within the categories of ability, attitude, and pressures. Finally, the diagnostic testing of an entire Command and General Staff College class with a standardized English composition examination demonstrates the magnitude of the army's writing problem based on national standards.

Diagnostic testing indicated that army officers as a group are average writers, although a significant number (18.5%) of those tested were below national minimum writing standards. The basic cause of army writing difficulties is found to be the failure of the American educational system to teach students to write properly and the failure of the military schools to compensate for those early inadequacies in preparing the army officer to successfully perform his military writing tasks. Army officers express little preference for writing assignments and the military profession offers minimal reinforcement of good writing attitudes. The resulting attitude of the army officer towards writing

is a neutral one. In the pressure category, the manager seems to be the source of most writing pressures. Army writers feel that managers do not adequately define writing objectives for their subordinates, thus causing a doubt and confusion which results in vague and verbose writing. Managers also over-supervise through excessive reviewing of written communications, thus causing the writer to have difficulty focusing on his ultimate reader. The causes, then, are a complex combination of educational deficiencies, neutral attitudes, and inadequate management practices.

This thesis recommends further study of methods which can be employed to alleviate or eliminate these specific performance, attitude, and leadership deficiencies. Since many of those deficiencies are academic in nature, they can be remedied if the military education system addresses the needs of army writers and managers which have been identified in this study.

If language is not used rightly, then what is said is not what is meant. If what is said is not what is meant, then that which ought to be done is left undone; if it remains undone, morals and arts will be corrupted; if morals and arts are corrupted, justice will go awry, and if justice goes awry, the people will stand about in helpless confusion.

Confucius

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM

Background

There is increasing concern that Americans are losing the ability to use their native English language; in fact, some say we have almost become an illiterate culture. A famous television newscaster, Edwin Newman, recently wrote a book on that very subject which quickly rose to the top of the nation's bestseller list.[1] Besides becoming a popular topic of conversation, this issue has aroused considerable interest throughout the business and professional world. Many authorities believe that language failure, especially in the area of written communications, is making a serious adverse impact on the efficiency of the organizations which conduct the economic and political business of the nation.

The military has not been immune to society's difficulties with written communications, nor has it failed to express its concern for the effects of writing failures on the performance of its basic missions. Military writing authorities and leaders have acknowledged the problem for many years.[2] Voicing the concern and commitment of contemporary army leaders, the Commandant of the United States Army Command and General Staff College recently stated:

> Writing deficiencies in our Army are deep-seated. They are

> rooted in the United States school system, media usages, and culture. Quality of expression will in the long run determine quality of performance. We have to figure out a way to "lick" this problem.[3]

The Military's Unique Requirements

For some leaders in the action-oriented military profession, it might not be readily apparent that "quality of expression will determine quality of performance." But, written communications can profoundly affect the military leader's command and control over his unit. And there also seems to be a relationship between writing standards and the intellectual and moral standards of the military profession.

Command and control. Since many military messages are too crucial to be transmitted in the short-lived oral form or too complex to be explained without putting them in writing, the army has a requirement for clear, accurate, and concise written communications. The worldwide dispersion of military units curtails clarification and limits timely feedback, so a written message usually must clearly carry the thoughts of the sender over a geographical distance as well as through several layers of the military organizational structure. This formidable task is sometimes further complicated when the messages are written and received in the charged atmosphere of a military crisis. Admiral Kimmel's failure to correctly interpret the messages warning him of the imminent Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor represents a failure of written communications at the highest levels of command.[4]

Although there are few peacetime messages of such importance, the critical need for clear writing remains as the information explosion threatens to suffocate the military in the glut of its own paperwork.

The modern commander must communicate his thoughts through this congested medium so clearly that they will not be misunderstood. Since these thoughts are usually meant to be translated into action, his failure to communicate negates his control over the actual performance of his command.

Reasoning. Aleksei Tolstoi once said, "Language is the tool of thought. To handle language haphazardly means to think haphazardly."[5] The intellectual ramifications of writing are subtle, yet they may be critical to the future of the army as it encounters a world which is becoming increasingly complex. The officer's ability to comprehend and order that world is challenged as he finds that he can no longer mentally process all of the variables involved in solving even the most basic problems. To compensate for the inadequacy of his mental "core storage" when analyzing a situation, he must quickly convert his elusive ideas to written words. Completing the analysis, he then makes a decision which often must be persuasively communicated in writing. It is this written message which triggers action, not the logical process, the analysis, or the decision. We see, then, the integral role of written expression in thinking and effecting decisions. The military cannot accurately evaluate a man's intelligence and judgment in complex matters unless it first considers his writing on which the first two are so dependent. Conversely, the military education system is limiting an officer's intellect and decision-making ability unless it guides the development of his writing, a tool he needs to use those two critical faculties.[6]

Integrity.

> George Orwell, in "Politics and the English language says there is a connection between debasement of the language and political collapse . . . . We must believe that the necessary act, however, can be and must be explained in clear and simple language.[7]

There may well be a critical relationship between personal integrity and clear written expression. If an officer feels that he must inflate his language to convey a simple requirement or evaluation report, his moral values will come in direct conflict with the communication customs or exigencies of the military organization. The erosion of standards will then spread throughout his writing. His decisions will be translated into safe, ambiguous statements; he will pretend to knowledge by using jargon or "gobbledygook."[8] The Secretary of the Army emphasized the relationship between writing and integrity in his recent message to members of the Department of the Army staff: "Effective writing . . . . relates to credibility, openness, candor."[9] The maintenance of writing standards may therefore be crucial not only to the purity of the language, but also to the integrity of the officer's code.

Present Efforts To Improve Military Writing

There are two general approaches towards writing education which most organizations have tried in an effort to compensate for their employees' lack of proper academic preparation. One approach favors the use of rigid "how to" programs which are built around a few "infallible" rules; the other approach leaves the training of the writer to his superiors.[10] Neither method seems to have worked. The first attempts to teach a mechanical process while ignoring the human

communicator and the dynamics of his interaction with his work environment; the second is so subjectively involved with that environment that the writer fails to learn any of the objective principles and standards of good writing.[1]

But, the recent emphasis by the Secretary of the Army has caused the military to take more innovative steps towards solving the army's writing problems. A Conference on Army Writing met at Fort Leavenworth in December 1974 to begin investigating the problem and discussing solutions which could be implemented throughout the army school system. Delegates from 16 military installations, to include representatives of the British Army, the Canadian Forces, and the United States Marine Corps attended the conference. The final report from the meeting of that authoritative group confirms the seriousness of the problem and calls for a comprehensive educational program to monitor the development of army officers as writers as well as instructors and leaders of those who write.[11] But, before any ultimate solutions to the military's complex problem can be found, there must be a thorough understanding of the causes of that problem.

THESIS INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This study will investigate the topic of army writing to discover causes for its failures.

Definition

Army writing is defined as the normal written communications of the commander and staff officer: correspondence, reports, plans, directives, staff studies and evaluations.

Objectives

1. Define the general nature and magnitude of the army's writing problem.

2. Postulate causes for the writing problems of army officers and test those postulates for validity and significance.

3. Discover the relative severity of each cause to find the predominant factors if a condition of multiple causes exists.

4. Determine relationships between various causes to discover the controlling variable if a chain of causes exists.

Importance

1. Before the military can hope to solve its writing problems, it must identify the causes of those problems. Otherwise it may be treating only the symptoms of the problem or perhaps even aggravating the problem with inappropriate solutions. This study seeks to describe the operation of the causes for those who would apply solutions.

2. An analysis of the relationships between the various causes of writing problems should give military leaders and educators specific priorities for their attention. It should also indicate to them which causes can be eliminated, which can be alleviated, and which must be endured. Further studies can then address how the causes can be eliminated or alleviated.

3. The survey method used in this study can be used as a model for future surveys at the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College (hereafter referred to as CGSC).

SCOPE

Possible causes of writing problems will be grouped into three categories: ability, attitude, and pressures. This study investigates each category in detail and in isolation, and then compares the categories to discover the dominant causes of writing problems in the army.

Ability

The study attempts to determine whether there is a general lack of writing ability among army officers. Where writing deficiencies are discovered, it seeks to discover whether they are caused by inadequacies in either the civilian or military education of the officer. It also considers the relationship between writing ability and writing experience of the officer.

Attitude

The prevailing attitudes of army officers towards writing are identified and analyzed to discover whether they are fostered and reinforced by the military system. The attitudes of various groups of army officers are correlated with efficiency rating practices.

Pressures

The possible effects of pressures on the army officer when he writes are investigated. Such pressures are classified into three categories: environmental, managerial, and personal.

Environmental pressures. Various external factors and situations might adversely affect the officer's ability to write. Frequent changes of assignment, working under the tensions and deadlines of crises, and

strict formats and procedures might be unique causes of pressures within the military environment. These and other environmental conditions will be analyzed to determine if they interfere with army writers.

Managerial pressures. The actions of military leaders might be hindering the writing of their subordinates. Due to the subjective nature of writing tasks and the fact that much written communication is so important that it requires the review of superiors, the relationship between the writer and his superior is extremely critical. Poor interpersonal communications, organizational frictions, or improper reviewing practices could all cause managerial pressures if they are found to be present in military organizations.

Personal pressures. The army writer's perceptions of himself, his environment, and his superiors might be the source of pressures. Such internally-generated pressures might result from feelings of inadequacy or fear of writing the wrong thing. Whether the psychological threats are real or imagined, they could cause poor writing if they are felt when army officers write.

STRUCTURE

The thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1 -- Statement of the problem. Purpose, scope, objectives, and limitations of this study.

Chapter 2 -- Review of related literature.

Chapter 3 -- Discussion of methodology.

Chapter 4 -- Analysis and interpretation of writing problems and their causes based on a survey and diagnostic testing.

Chapter 5 -- Synthesis, conclusions, recommendations, and summary.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

1. This study assumes that there is a writing problem as described in the criticism of military leaders and writing experts. It does not go into a specific analysis of the problem, but rather sees it in general terms as a lack of precision, clarity, and conciseness. The entire focus of the study is on the causes of that problem.

2. The use of literature research is based on the assumption that analogies can be made between writing practices in business and technical organizations and those in military organizations. Where such parallels are evident, the causes of writing problems in business and technical organizations are applied to military organizations. This compensates for the scarcity of literature devoted to the causes of the military's writing problems.

3. Although officers, enlisted men, and civilians have writing tasks for the army, this study only investigates the causes of army officers' writing problems.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This review analyzes articles and books which give insights into the causes of army officers' writing problems.

Scope

Due to the inherent complexity and the lack of definitive studies of this topic, the literature research delves into a variety of areas: linguistics, business communications, English composition, and organizational psychology. This review organizes the presentation of this research into two parts: "General Writing" and "Organizational Writing." Since there are only a limited number of sources which address the causes of military writing problems, the references to the military will be included in the "Organizational Writing" section.

The "General Writing" section investigates literature which addresses the basic causes of writing problems in American society. One can then establish the fundamental source of army officers' writing problems, since they learned to write in that society and are still governed by the language practices of their culture.

Besides containing the references to military writing, the "Organizational Writing" section reviews the literature in the fields of

organizational communications and psychology. It addresses the various barriers to good written communications found in large, multi-layered organizations. The focus of much of the literature is on the complex problems encountered by writers and managers because of the common requirement for supervisors to review written organizational communications.

GENERAL WRITING

The Problem

The marked trend of declining American literacy which has been decried by educators and businessmen for the past thirty years is now becoming scientifically evident. A recent study by the federally-funded National Assessment of Educational Progress which sampled 100,000 Americans found serious writing deficiencies throughout our society. Only 50% of the young adults tested (between 26 and 35 years of age) were able to successfully complete each of three basic writing tasks: write an invitation, fill out an application blank, and order an item from a store.[1] This failure is also evidenced at the college level; the Wall Street Journal recently noted that college textbook publishers are finding it necessary to rewrite their texts for ninth-grade reading levels.[2] Over a decade ago, the dean of the Harvard Business School reported that "an incredible number of college graduates who apply for admission can't write a passable sentence."[3] That the problem is getting worse seems borne out by a 7% decline in the average score on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) over the past ten years.[4] The common complaint in the research sources is that writers cannot clearly convey their thoughts because their writing is disorganized, verbose, and

grammatically incorrect. No one particular fault stands out; there are failures in the use of paragraphs, sentences, and words.

The Causes

Some critics declare that the root cause of writing problems is our anti-language culture.[5] The average American spends more time watching television than he does in school.[6] He seems to be turning away from the verbal medium to avoid being overwhelmed by the deluge of print produced by the information explosion.[7] Besides seeking his information from the visual medium, he is becoming increasingly dependent on the computer. An executive recently declared that it was easier to find people trained and willing to write the mathematical binary language of computers than to write competent English.[8] Making excuses for their failure to continue writing after graduation, some people comfort themselves with the false notion that they will never lose their writing skill once they have learned it in school. But the National Assessment of Educational Progress survey showed that this capability atrophies unless it is exercised.[9]

There is considerable condemnation of the American educational system for failing to respond to these problems. One school administrator declared that too many teachers feel that "reading and written expression are outmoded, that logical thought is pretentious, and that one can acquire all of the data one really needs through visual means."[10] Another critic noted that teachers were foolishly adapting to the machine age and rejecting subjective testing for an objective testing method which does not challenge the student's writing skills.[11] Teaching writing is difficult, requiring long hours of grading, so many English teachers concentrate on literature, thus graduating English majors

who cannot teach writing. Thus it is not surprising that in 1964 the College Entrance Board's Commission discovered that one-third of the English teachers in secondary schools were unfit to teach writing.[12] And, the noted scholar and literary critic, Jacques Barzun, admits that many academicians are perpetuating poor English by using stilted pompous language themselves.[13]

ORGANIZATIONAL WRITING

The Problem

Many business and military communications authorities reluctantly confirm the truth of the statement of the dean of the University of Pittsburg law school that "the graduates of our colleges, including the best ones, can not write the English language."[14] Supporting this view, the former Commandant of the U. S. Army Air Defense School believes that military service schools failed the officer corps because they incorrectly assumed that army officers were properly trained to write in college. He estimates that only 25% of the officers in today's army consistently write well enough to be understood.[15]

The effect of such a dire situation in the military has resulted in the tragic loss of command and control on the battlefield.[16] The battle arena for civilian organizations is the competitive marketplace and failures in written communications can be very critical there also.

> The biggest untapped source of net profits for American business lies in the sprawling, edgeless area of written communication where waste cries out for management action.[17]

It is estimated that a minimum of 20% would be saved in the cost of business letters alone, if business writers eliminated excess verbiage.[18] Commenting on a more insidious effect of obscure and pretentious writing,

one authority observes,

> the great evil . . . that it allows the user to get away with vagueness and irresponsibility for what he says at the same time that it makes him sound highly professional and articulate.[19]

It is not surprising, then, that organizational leaders are trying to eliminate gobbledygook in its military form (pentagonese) and in its civilian form (bussinessese). That emphasis was evidenced in a survey of 133 top business executives which indicated that the three most important college courses -- from a list of over forty -- that an aspiring business student should take are business communications, human relations, and English composition.[20] Similar attention is being given to the need for the army to emphasize the teaching of functional writing in its military service schools.[21]

The Cause

In business and technical writing -- as in military writing -- the relationship of the employee/writer with the manager/reviewer creates a new dimension for investigation of the causes of writing problems. Although the relationship is a dynamic one, I will analyze the causes as either manager controlled or writer controlled, depending on who has the most influence on the causal factors.

Manager-Controlled Causes

Lack of manager training. Research sources commented that managers are rarely trained in the technique of supervising employees who write for them.[22] Proper supervision requires expertise in human relations, language arts, editing methods, and organizational management.[23] At the very least, managers must be aware of the causes of

writing difficulties and recognize that they have power to aggravate or alleviate them.[24]

Editing and reviewing practices. In many large business and financial organizations writers must write for a superior's signature or filter their writing through supervisors. One communication expert feels that such written communications will be distorted unless the writer and the reviewer make the following agreement: 1) Recognize that the ultimate reader of the message is the most important individual in the communications process; 2) Recognize that there are different, but equally effective ways of expressing ideas.[25] If a man must arbitrarily alter his personal writing style, his writing will lose force and effectiveness.[26]

Few managers recognize this situation or are qualified to be editors.[27] Although most are careful to impose definite goals in company production and set up strict work procedures, when it comes to writing they fail to define editing standards by which they can evaluate and give feedback to their employees.[28] And when editing their subordinates' writing, they either edit by instinct or mistakenly attempt to consider content, style, and mechanics all at the same time, rather than first looking for meaning and then for form.[29]

Research shows that some reviewers change a subordinate's writing just to "show who is boss" or to justify their position in the organization.[30] Others seek merely to satisfy their own idiosyncrasies, demanding favorite "buzz words."[31] Authorities feel that such arbitrary editing diminishes the enthusiasm and initiative of the writer, eliciting the apathetic attitude expressed in the words, "Why spend a lot of time preparing reports that are only going to be changed anyway?"[32] In such

a situation, young writers are also encouraged to simply imitate the writing of those in authority to avoid correction, thus perpetuating old problems.[33] Another source mentions the gross inefficiency of over-reviewing which "is responsible for the great amount of dull, difficult, obscure, hackneyed, wordy writing in business -- and its enormous wastefulness."[34] And finally, several experts feel that such practices, especially when several reviewers have edited a piece, are sources of writing incoherency.[35]

Vague writing assignments. Managers face the dilemma of giving precise writing assignments without limiting free, innovative thinking in their staff members.[36] One author describes the case of the senior federal official who complained about long, vague reports, until he finally realized that he was telling his writers, "Look into this." Because he had not given them a definite purpose or scope, their writing reflected uncertainty and an attempt to cover all contingencies.[37]

Group writing. Several authors identify the practice of writing by committee as wasteful and a cause of obscure, watered down writing. They note that many productive "brainstorming" sessions end in time-consuming unproductive haggling when the group attempts to draft a corporate written statement.[38]

Time and location constraints. The more clear and concise a manager wants his written communication, the more time he must allow his subordinates to prepare it. The famous scientist, Pascal, once wrote, "I hope you will pardon me for writing such a long letter, but I did not have the time to write a shorter one." A writer needs the opportunity to rewrite his own drafts and to get proper feedback from his superior.[39]

Often, however, he causes the time problem himself because he puts off the assignment to the last minute.[40] Several experts also argue that reading is a prelude to good writing, but that busy executives feel they rarely have time to read.[41] The lack of a quiet place to read and write was also mentioned as an obvious factor.[42]

Strict formats. One leader feels that the army's requirement to write in prescribed formats intimidates some writers.[43] Another authority even declares that the military interferes with logical construction by requiring its writers to number paragraphs in reports and memoranda. He also feels that such a practice misleads the reader by creating the mistaken impression that all paragraphs have equal importance.[44]

Writer Controlled Causes

Poor thinking. Most research indicated that a primary cause of poor writing was poor thinking.[45] Business writers often attempt to communicate before they have fully thought out their purpose. Then they try to write without a rough draft or outline, failing to recognize that the first attempt at formulating ideas is rarely precise. Since rewriting forces the writer to see his own obscurity and incoherency, his improvements in expression and improvements in thinking will reinforce each other.[46] But, if he tries to make both perfect in one writing, elusive thoughts will disappear while he labors over his style.[47]

Jargon. A recent study observed that NASA scientists were more likely to use jargon in their writing than in their speech. A noted psycholinguist declares that this indicates that jargon does not result from carelessness with language. Rather, scientists take time to incorporate jargon into their writing, while they have less opportunity to use

it in their speech, which is usually more spontaneous. He therefore infers that it is being used for a definite purpose -- impressing the audience. This seems to be supported by his findings that it was also more prevalent in the written communications they sent out to the public, than in their internal written messages.[48]

Some sources, emphasizing the futility of attempting to popularize complex technical terms, support the use of jargon.[49] Others condemn it only when it purposely excludes some readers.[50] One critic claims that ignorant men revel in technicalities because they cannot think clearly or because they are too lazy to take the time to make their thoughts intelligible.[51]

Psychological pressures. One author argues that the crucial factor in eliminating writing difficulties in a large organization is the treatment of the psychological, rather than the linguistic, needs of the writer: "Emotions, not mechanics or techniques, are the real driving forces behind communications."[52]

1. Fear is sometimes identified as the basic cause of vague, abstract writing.[53] Because writing creates a permanent record, the writer wants to be sure that he does not say anything for which he will later be criticized; and so he tends to use more ambiguities and euphemisms in his writing than in his speech.[54] Also, because he fears criticism of his writing style, he stares at a blank page or labors over the mechanics of his writing, completely ignoring the flow of his thoughts.[55]

Some critics point to the fear of accepting responsibility as the most common reason for the overuse of the passive voice in organizational writing.[56] They argue that it hides the agent of the action, while making

it difficult for the reader to understand the precise meaning of the message. They also note that it is much harder for a writer to construct a clear grammatical sentence in the passive voice.[57]

2. Status is an important need for employees in any organization, and they frequently search for that status by using inflated language in their writing. Schopenhauer observed that many writers "try to make the reader believe that their thoughts have gone much further and deeper than is really the case."[58] Several research sources put this desire to impress high on the list of the causes for gobbledygook.[59]

3. Imitation. Because some people are successful in their status-seeking through the use of pretentious language, others try to emulate their writing techniques.[60] Scholarly journals are cited as particularly responsible for the perpetuation of much of this type of gobbledygook.[61]

SUMMARY

Literature on the contemporary American writing situation shows a very interesting phenomenon. Writing has been neglected in the academic sector of society, while it is rapidly gaining in importance in the normally less literary parts of the culture -- the military, business, and scientific professions. Apparently the schools view writing as a secondary skill which will automatically develop while one learns his primary job. However, the men who supervise those who work in our society's jobs seem to consider writing an essential skill which must be developed before one can learn about and function in any position. The practical businessman realizes that he must communicate

to survive, and all the newest technology only increases his need to have clear and concise written communications to report on the ever more complex world. He is frustrated because the schools are sending him prospective employees who have been trained to work in a specialized, technical society, but who can not write. Thus, the business world, like the military, is beginning to investigate how it can improve itself to compensate for those critical deficiencies.

Although there is this universal concern among organizational leaders, the literature shows a lack of agreement about the primary causes of writing problems as well as several inconsistencies concerning the proper solutions to the problems. All this uncertainty among the experts may well be one of the causes of the problem, because it leads the writer to lose confidence in those who should be guiding him. Such disagreement also points up the very subjective nature of the topic, which again may be one of the reasons for the problem in organizations which usually attempt to objectify things for maximum efficiency. This only reinforces the need for a definitive empirical study of the causes of the problem and a testing of the validity of the various factors presented in the literature.

The literature does seem to support the important assumption of this thesis that there is a strong analogy between military and civilian organizational writing problems and their causes. Business and military leaders inherit the same deficiencies in the writers they receive from the American school system. Both are faced with the same requirement to insure effective communications within their organizations, and both make the same mistakes in supervising their writers. Within each organization, writers have identical requirements to write for reviewers

and are faced with similar psychological and environmental pressures. This analogy between military and civilian organizations is extremely important, because it means that the military, which has done very little investigation of the causes of its writing problems, can benefit from the research of the civilian community. On the other hand, it also means that this study can be applied by civilian corporations to an understanding of the causes of their own problems.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This thesis combines a variety of research techniques to discover and explain the operation of the causes of writing problems in the army. Since those problems might result from actual causes (for example, lack of academic writing preparation) or perceived causes (the fear of inadequate writing preparation), the study examines both objective and subjective data. This chapter presents the logic and goals of this approach, focusing on the three principal research techniques used in the thesis: literature research, attitude survey, and diagnostic testing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The presentation of research of the literature about writing has the two-fold purpose of providing background and a foundation for the thesis on the one hand, and of serving as an integral element of the logical development of the thesis on the other hand. Initially, the literature research is necessary to understand the general nature of the problem, to comprehend its importance, and to put the military's situation in context. This background is important because it points out possible avenues for the subsequent study to follow. It also identifies likely postulates for testing in the thesis. The product of the

literature research is also interwoven into the basic structure of the thesis. This second function endeavors to analyze and interpret the literature as evidence leading to an understanding of the causes of army writing problems.

Literature on General Writing

The language practices and standards within the general American society have a great impact on the writing of army officers. They learned to write in the academic institutions of that society and they are affected daily by the communication practices of a media-dominated culture. Therefore, the research into general literature illuminates some of the basic causes of army writing problems.

Literature on Organizational Writing

This section of the literature review concentrates on the fields of organizational communications and psychology, seeking to discover the causes of writing problems peculiar to organizations. The army is a very large,multi-layered organization with some unique writing problems due to its mission, size, and governmental affiliation. But the similarities to a large corporation, at least in the area of written communications, are so great that many reliable analogies can be made between causes of military and business/technical writing problems.[1] Thus the scarcity of research sources in the military writing field can be alleviated by making logical inferences based on such comparisons. This certainly is valuable in identifying the common causes of writing difficulties in organizations. But it will be even more vital to those considering solutions to those problems, because the military can learn from the successes and failures of civilian organizations.

SURVEY

Introduction

A questionnaire was given to a representative group of student army officers at the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College (hereafter referred to as CGSC) to ascertain their perceptions of the causes of army writing problems. The views of this particular group of army writers provide insights into the pressures felt by writers as well as the attitudes of those who will someday supervise other writers, because many of the officers surveyed will become senior staff officers within the next ten years. Although the survey data does not necessarily describe reality, rather only individuals' perceptions of reality, it is important to note that attitudes and perceptions are often more crucial in such a subjective field as writing. Furthermore, the perceptions from the survey often supplement and confirm the more objective data from the literature research and test. Thus the thesis gains strength and cohesiveness in its analysis of this subjective topic through a synthesis of perception and fact. See Appendix A for survey and percentage of responses for each answer.

Survey Organization

The survey was constructed to test the basic postulate of the thesis that the causes of army writing problems could be identified within the categories of ability, attitude, and pressures. Although the questionnaire was written before much of the literature research was conducted, the findings from literature support the structure and considerations of the survey. A list of the four survey categories with the corresponding questionnaire numbers and topics (Appendix A)

follows:

1. Demographic information - (1) Rank, (2) Source of commission, (3) Heavy writing experience, (30) Promoted ahead of contemporaries, (31) Military family, (32) Education level.

2. Ability perceptions - (4) Adequate high school/college preparation, (5) Writing problems, (6) Competent writer, (9) Previous ratings by superiors.

3. Attitude perceptions - (7) Prefer writing, (8) Rated others, (10) Writing important to career.

4. Pressure perceptions - (11-16) Environmental rankings, (17-20) Managerial rankings, (21-26) Personal rankings, (27-29) General rankings.

Sample Description

The typical CGSC class contains officers from allied nations, other services, and every army branch. The army officers generally attend between the 8th and 15th year of commissioned service. Approximately the upper 50% of the officer corps by merit are selected to attend CGSC.[2]

The survey was administered to the army officers in four randomly chosen CGSC sections. The CGSC class contains twenty sections, each having approximately fifty army officers. The sections are balanced at the beginning of the school year to contain a cross-section of officer students. An independent study of survey procedures at CGSC concludes that three sections represent an adequate survey sample.[3] The survey was distributed to 197 army officers; 168 (85%) of the officers returned a completed questionnaire.

Survey Procedure

An information sheet (Appendix B) was distributed with the survey to each officer. It defined the topic of the survey, emphasized the anonymity of the results, and gave instructions for completion and return of the answer sheets. Responses were recorded on "mark-sense" forms which were used to produce a card deck. The data cards were fed into a computer program written especially for this project.

Data Analysis

The totals of the entire survey population of 168 officers (hereafter referred to as the master group) were tabulated for each response and converted to percentages for each question (see Appendix A). Since the study seeks to compare the experiences and attitudes of different groups of army officers (for example, by rank or educational level), the percentage responses of various subgroups of the survey population were also tabulated for comparison with the master group and with each other. The findings and correlations are tested for significance by using the "chi-square test."[4] A level of .10 is considered significant in this study.

Survey Limitation

This survey restricts the responder to consider only those pressures which are listed in the questionnaire. He also must rank all pressures even if some do not apply to his experience. The analysis of the data therefore focuses only on the two highest choices to ensure that only meaningful responses are being considered.

TEST

Introduction

Since there was no diagnostic testing of the survey group, this thesis does not attempt to correlate test scores and individual perceptions. However, a College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) diagnostic test of all the army officers in a CGSC class (981 officers) is used to determine the relative ability of CGSC officers according to national standards. Although the test was given to the class previous to the survey group (CGSC, 1973-1974), the two classes are both representative of the same group in the army and are demographically similar. See Appendix C for a discussion of the profiles of recent CGSC classes.

Description

The examination is a standardized English composition test prepared and graded by the College Entrance Examination Board.[5] Scores are adjusted to give a percentile grade based on a model norming group of college sophomores. The test is primarily used by businesses and colleges to determine sophomore level validation for writing ability or to identify students or employees who need remedial writing training.

Analysis of Data

The test results are analyzed to determine how the average of the CGSC group compares to national averages to determine if CGSC officers as a group have writing problems. They are also used to determine how many CGSC officers fall below minimum writing standards as an indication of the magnitude of the military's writing problem.

SUMMARY

Each of the three research techniques - testing, survey, and literature review - performs a different function. In this study the three methods complement each other as integral parts of the total effort. Ultimately, by comparing the data from the various sources and discovering areas of reinforcement or redundancy, one can isolate the causal constants which are the sources of writing problems in the army. Such definitive conclusions are more likely to come from such a synthesis of the interpretations from all the research techniques.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Background

The findings in this chapter are based on the results of a survey administered to 168 student army officers in the 1974-1975 CGSC class and on the results of a diagnostic test taken by all 981 student army officers in the 1973-1974 CGSC class. Interpretations of this data are made with reference to the information presented from the literature research in previous chapters.

The chi-square test is used to determine the significance of differences between the responses of various groups on the survey. Findings are not declared "significant" unless chi-square is significant beyond the .10 level; thus there is only a 10% probability of any differences occurring by chance.

The Problem

Most critics feel that the basic problem with military writing is that it is too often wordy, ambiguous, and stilted. They identify poor military writing in such pejorative terms as "gobbledygook," "pentagonese," or "military jargon." The CGSC survey respondents identified the specific areas of their most severe writing difficulties in the following order (Appendix A, Question 6):

Organization	33.1%
Spelling and Punctuation	21.1%
Choice of words	19.3%
Grammar	9.0%

The problems with organization should be considered in light of the view of one authority that some military formats hamper the ability of the writer to present his information in a logical manner,[1] however there is not enough evidence to make any reliable interpretation of the significance of those findings.

THE CAUSES

Ability

Based on College Level Examination Program's (CLEP) testing of all the members of the 1973-1974 CGSC class, the army officers were slightly better writers than the test norming group of college sophomores. The mean score of the CLEP English Composition examination's norming group was 498, while the mean for the CGSC officers was 509.3.[2] Since this test is generally used by schools and businesses throughout the country to determine general writing aptitude, one cannot say that army writers as a group are deficient by national standards. However, 181 members (18.5%) of the CGSC group had scores below the 25th percentile on the test scale and thus failed to meet the minimum recommended validation standards.[3] This indicates that nearly one out of five of the top 50% of army officers at mid-career have difficulty successfully performing the most basic writing tasks and are in need of remedial training.

Inadequate academic preparation. The survey data (Table 1)

shows a positive correlation between perceived writing competency and educational level.

Table 1

Relationship between Perceived Ability and Educational Level

Perceptions	Educational Level High(32c,d)[a]	Low(32a,b)
Competent Writer(6a)[b]	67.9[c]	32.1
Writing Problems(5a,b)	37.7	62.3

Chi-square test yielded a significant difference between categories at the .01 significance level.

[a]Figures in parentheses in all tables in this thesis refer to the question number and response in CGSC survey (Appendix A).

[b]Competent writers (6a) and those who acknowledge writing problems (5a,b) represent two mutually exclusive groups based on the results of the survey.

[c]Data presented in all tables in this thesis are percentages unless otherwise noted.

However, the college degree is apparently no guarantee of even marginal writing proficiency, since more than 89% of the CGSC officers who failed to meet the minimum writing standards in the CLEP examination had college degrees.[4] These findings are supported by the education authorities who confirm the increasing failure of America's higher education to prepare students to write competently (q.v. Chapter 3). Those officers who acknowledged personal writing problems in the survey were strongest in the condemnation of their non-military academic writing preparation. Thus it appears that educational deficiencies, but not lack of academic degrees,are causes of writing problems for some officers.

Table 2

Relationship of Non-military Academic Writing Preparation to Perceptions of Writing Ability

Perceptions	Adequate HS/College Writing Preparation(4a)
Competent Writers(6a)	93.1
Writing Problems(5a,b)	27.8

Chi-square test yielded a significant difference between categories at the .001 significance level.

Brigadier General Stephen Mellnik, a former service school commandant, declares that the military schools have failed the officer corps because they incorrectly assume that army officers were properly trained to write in college.[5] His views are borne out by the findings of this study. In the CGSC survey group those who felt they had received inadequate non-military writing training also made a significant condemnation of their military writing education, while those who were adequately prepared in high school and college had little blame for army schools (Table 3). Thus it seems that the lack of a strong remedial writing program in army schools has a detrimental impact on army writing.

Table 3

Relationship between Failure of Civilian and Military Schools

High School/College Writing Preparation	Inadequate Military Writing Education(14a,b)
Adequate (4a)	13.0
Inadequate(4b)	42.9

Chi-square test yielded a significant difference between categories at the .001 significant level.

Lack of writing experience. The experience of the CLEP English Composition testing program indicates that there is a steady deterioration in writing ability between the ages of 23 and 32.[6] The National Assessment of Educational Progress survey confirmed this and its findings were interpreted to demonstrate that writing skills are lost because they are not exercised sufficiently after graduation from school.[7] In the CGSC survey, those who acknowledged writing problems felt that a lack of opportunity to receive writing experience adversely affected their writing (Table 4). This is important because after graduation from CGSC the typical officer begins to receive staff assignments which require him not only to write but to supervise others whose primary duty is writing.

Table 4

Relationship of Writing Experience to Writing Ability

Ability Perceptions	Lack of Sufficient Writing Experience(13a,b)
Writing Problem(5a,b)	37.7
Competent Writer(6a)	3.7

Chi-square yielded a significant difference between categories at the .001 significance level.

Attitude

Even though an officer has a basic writing ability, his writing performance could be adversely affected if he has a negative attitude towards writing tasks. The attitudes of army officers are formed by their personal preferences and by the conditioning they receive from the military institution. It is important to note that the officers in the CGSC set the army's institutional attitudes for the following fifteen years because they become the leaders of that institution. Their personal attitudes thus become especially important. In general, the master survey group demonstrated a neutral attitude towards the importance of writing ability to a military career (Appendix A, question 10).

Personal preference. The fact that the military profession generally attracts men who want to lead is probably the reason why 85% of the officers in the survey preferred action tasks over writing tasks (Appendix A, question 7). That this personal preference does carry over into attitudes is suggested by a correlation between the preference question and the attitude question on the survey.

Table 5

Relationship of Writing Preference and Attitude

Preference	Attitude	
	Positive(10a)	Negative(10c)
Writing(7a)	68.0	8.0
Action(7b)	43.0	15.5

Chi-square test yielded a difference between categories at the .15 significance level.

Again, the army officer meets a dilemma at mid-career (about the time he attends CGSC), because he will have far fewer of his preferred action jobs and an increasing number of writing assignments for the remainder of his career. He is faced with the task of changing his attitudes towards writing, even though he still does not prefer writing.

Institutional attitude reinforcement. The survey shows some indication that writing attitudes are perpetuated by the examples of those in authority. Those who declared that no mention of their writing had ever been made in their Officer Efficiency Reports (OER) also expressed stronger negative attitudes towards writing. They, in turn showed less inclination to rate their subordinates on their writing.

Table 6

Relationship between Attitude and Rating Experience

Attitude	Never Rated on Writing(9a)
Positive(8a)	14.1
Negative(8b)	20.8

Chi-square test yielded a difference between categories at the .50 significance level.

Table 7

Relationship between Rating Experience and Rating Practices

Rating Practices	Never Rated on Writing(9a)
Have Rated Subordinates(8a)	13.3
Never Rated Subordinates(8b)	19.2

Chi-square test yielded a difference between categories at the .25 significance level.

The fact that only 1.8% of the respondents (Appendix A, question 9) acknowledged being rated below "above average" on writing ability on any OER indicates that the evaluation system is not providing accurate reinforcement. This is probably due to the inflated rating system, but it nevertheless demonstrates that the significant number of officers (18.5%) who have serious writing problems (considering the CLEP test results) are not being identified by the OER system.

The large number (46.7%) of respondents who never mentioned writing ability in their own evaluation of subordinates is significant. Even among those who expressed positive attitudes there were many (37.2%) who never considered writing ability in the OERs they wrote. This data confirms the neutral attitude towards writing in the military, but also indicates that officers do not translate good attitudes into objective measures which will reinforce those attitudes in others.

Pressures

The "Review of Literature" chapter described the various pressures which operate on writers in large business organizations. Similar

pressures could adversely affect the writing of army officers who have no attitude or ability deficiencies. On the other hand, such pressures could also aggravate the writing difficulties of a weak writer or reinforce negative attitudes towards writing. Depending on their source, the pressures are categorized in this study as environmental, managerial, or personal.

Environmental Pressures

Table 8

Rankings of Environmental Pressures

RANK	TOTAL	QUESTION NUMBER	QUESTION TOPIC
1	66.4[a]	11	Lack of time.
2	45.4	12	No place to write.
3	26.7	15	No experts or editors.
4	24.5	14	Lack of military schooling.
5	22.0	13	Lack of experience.
6	16.6	16	Frequent job changes.

[a]Figures in all tables containing pressure data represent the total percentage of responses a and b for each question.

The two most detrimental environmental pressures are also the simplest and most obvious. The pressures of time and location are unavoidable in military crisis situations, but perhaps they unnecessarily persist in peacetime military organizations just as the literature review showed they persist in business corporations. The master rankings were consistent throughout all the subgroups with the important exception of those who acknowledged writing problems. They placed significantly greater blame on the failure of their military writing education (Table 9) and on lack of military writing experience (Table 4) than did those who felt they were competent writers. These observations indicate that those with problems are not receiving the training they feel they need to accomplish their writing tasks satisfactorily. West Point graduates, on the other hand, apparently felt that they received significantly better training than any other group.

Table 9

Comparison of Views of Officers on the Impact of Military Education on Their Writing

OFFICERS	INADEQUATE MILITARY WRITING TRAINING(14a,b)
West Point Graduates	6.1
Writing Problems	42.2
Competent Writers	17.9

Chi-square test yielded a significant difference between categories at the .10 significance level.

Managerial Pressures

Table 10

Rankings of Managerial Pressures

RANK	TOTAL	QUESTION NUMBER	QUESTION TOPIC
1	61.4	18	Lack of specific instructions.
2	54.8	19	Overemphasis on mechanics.
3	53.1	20	Buzz words.
4	28.7	17	Arbitrary editing.

There was unanimous agreement that the lack of a specific writing assignment is the most harmful managerial pressure. Criticism of that pressure was also persistent in the authorities researched in the literature review. Such universal condemnation of this one pressure indicates that it may be a primary cause of vague and verbose writing. Apparently, some managers either fail to decide what they want before giving a writing assignment or they believe that they are giving their writers more freedom for individual thought by giving them little guidance. Actually such managers may be limiting their writers to superficial thought and disorganized presentation of their ideas. They also may be aggravating environmental time pressures and personal feelings of threat or inadequacy.

Personal Pressures

Table 11

Rankings of Personal Pressures

RANK	TOTAL	QUESTION NUMBER	QUESTION TOPIC
1	54.0	23	Cannot focus on reader.
2	53.3	25	Cannot be frank.
3	38.3	22	Inflated language.
4	23.3	26	Lack of experience.
5	14.2	24	Avoid criticism.
6	14.2	21	Fear.

The two most powerful adverse personal pressures were those which were most closely related to elements over which managers have some control. Writers find great difficulty in focusing on the reader in their written communication. This problem is aggravated when managers overreview the writing of their subordinates. And the tone set by the manager can influence the natural threat felt by a writer when he is about to set his words into a permanent written record.

Summary of Pressures

Table 12

Rankings of Pressure Categories

Categories	Master		Competent Writers(6a)		Problem Writers(5a,b)	
	Rank	Most Harmful	Rank	Most Harmful	Rank	Most Harmful
Managerial (28)	1	42.4	2	39.3	1	35.9
Environmental (27)	2	39.6	1	57.1	3	30.2
Personal (29)	3	17.6	3	3.6	2	34.0

It is significant that managerial pressure most adversely affected army writing because that is the same factor which business organizations are also beginning to find a serious problem (q.v. Chapter 3). Managers actually have control over many elements which influence pressures in all three categories. However, managers are subject to many related pressures themselves, and therefore their power to alleviate pressures is often limited. The survey did not address that factor.

Those who felt they were competent writers were the only sub-group who listed environmental pressures rather than managerial pressures as the most harmful. They were naturally less bothered by feelings of personal inadequacy, and perhaps managers did not review and edit their writing as much because of confidence in their ability. The environmental pressures possibly bothered the competent writers more because they realized they could not overcome physical restraints with their writing ability.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The data from the test and survey indicates that the military does have writing problems, and for some officers those problems are quite serious. The test demonstrated that nearly one-fifth of the CGSC student officers do not write well enough to meet minimum national validation standards, and almost a third of the officers surveyed acknowledged personal writing problems. There were no definitive findings indicating the precise nature of those problems, although the inability to organize writing was listed as the most frequent problem.

Correlation of the survey data indicated that writing problems are related to educational levels, but still almost 90% of those who failed to meet the minimum standards on the diagnostic test did have college degrees. The survey also showed that writing problems are exacerbated for the officers who feel they have a writing difficulty or who feel they were inadequately prepared to write in school, because those individuals usually receive little writing experience during their careers. They quite naturally tend to avoid writing jobs or they are not given those assignments by superiors who recognize their deficiencies.

The survey group did not express a significant negative attitude towards writing, yet less than half of the officers expressed a definite positive attitude. There was no evidence that recognition was being given to good writers, nor did it seem that poor writers were being identified or censured. Thus the military profession does not seem to reinforce positive attitudes in the officer corps. The findings do not conclusively demonstrate, however, that the military's neutral attitude towards writing is a cause of army writing problems.

The survey confirmed the existence of all sixteen pressures which were tested, since the pressure which was least acknowledged still was harmful to 14% of the respondents. As previously discussed, the dominant pressures in each of the three categories were those which were most closely affected by the relationship between the writer and his leaders.

Chapter V

SUMMARY

SYNTHESIS

The three research methods complement each other; each substantiates and reinforces the findings of the other. The actual performance on the test validates the perceptions of officers in the survey and the opinions of many military authorities which were presented in the literature review. All concurred that the military had some serious writing problems. The survey data conforms to the views from the literature research in identifying the common causes of writing problems in organizations, especially in the predominant concern over the role of the manager of the writer.

The congruence between the findings in the literature review and the survey supports the assumption of this thesis that reliable analogies can be made between the causes of problems in civilian organizations and those in military organizations. Those who attempt to solve the army's writing problems can benefit from such analogies by learning from the mistakes of non-military organizations and imitating their successful solutions.

The correlation between the survey and the literature review also confirms the validity of the form and content of the survey. Thus the survey is an appropriate model for other writing surveys in the military. With minor modifications it could also be useful in civilian

organizations. Specific uses for the survey are discussed in the "Recommendations for Further Study" section of this chapter.

SUMMARY

Inadequate academic writing preparation at the high school and college levels seems to be the source of all the causes of the army's writing difficulties. It directly affects basic writing ability, influences preferences and attitudes towards writing, imposes pressures on unconfident writers, and leaves managers without the personal expertise to guide their subordinates and resolve their writing difficulties. The military has no control over that root cause, but it can alleviate the consequences of poor academic training in college by compensating with its own writing training in military service schools. The findings from all research methods agreed that the military was failing to give such help to its problem writers.

Although the military cannot eliminate the basic cause of its writing problems, there are many other causes over which either the military writer or the military leader has some control. The writer causes many problems for himself because he does not take the steps he needs to acquire a better writing education and to get the experience he requires to maintain a minimum writing skill. The study also showed that the writer is often more interested in impressing his readers or in being safely ambiguous than in communicating.

Much of the data of the study focused on the important role of the manager in the operation of the causes of writing problems. The one constant among the multiplicity of causes was the failure of the manager to properly supervise the writer. In some cases he does not give his writers the necessary guidance or opportunities for writing training.

Or, in other cases, the manager fails to reinforce positive attitudes through his correction and praise of subordinates. More directly, the manager is responsible for many pressures and practices which aggravate the problems of writers. Writing authorities and surveyed officers feel that managers magnify the task of the writer by giving him imprecise writing assignments. Then they also are charged with overreviewing writing, thus making it difficult for the writer to focus on his reader and confusing the ultimate writing product. Overreviewing also causes harmful time constraints on the writer because it forces him to hastily complete his writing task so his written communication can go through the many levels of the reviewing chain before reaching the ultimate reader.

There are several factors which the study set out to investigate as causes of army writing problems, but which could not be conclusively shown to be significant influences. The study does not demonstrate that there is a generally negative attitude towards writing in the military profession. There is little agreement over whether writing is or is not important to an officer's career. Also, many of the demographic groups studied in the survey showed no significant difference from the master group in attitudes or perceptions. Family background, rank, and success in the military all apparently have no particular relationship to writing problems.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is a definite writing problem in the army. Although only about one-fifth of the CGSC student officers have serious personal writing problems, those officers will have a significant impact on the total army writing effort. The graduates of CGSC normally are considered

qualified to become staff writers and managers of staff writers, thus officers with problems will perpetuate their bad writing and negative attitude in the military by their example and the pressures they bring to bear on their subordinates.

2. Military service schools are not compensating for the inadequacies of the civilian educational system. Writing problems are not being detected and corrected before the officer reaches the stage in his career at which he is eligible for senior staff assignments. Thus the military expects certain levels of writing skill in its officers when they reach field grade rank, but the military education system does little to insure that officers develop those skills if they were not acquired in high school or college.

3. Military managers are not prepared to control either the objective or subjective factors which adversely affect army writing. They do not use the correct techniques of editing the work of their subordinates and they are often too vague in their assignment of writing tasks. Military leaders often fail to provide a proper environment for their writers and cause them undue difficulty by cumbersome reviewing procedures, and many managers ignore the subjective, psychological needs of the writer. They do not attempt to alleviate the threats he feels when he writes and they do not recognize and correct his attempts to pretend to knowledge by verbose and officious writing. And finally, the leaders in the military profession fail to reinforce positive attitudes towards writing in their subordinates.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. A study should be conducted to establish a model for officer

writing development throughout the various stages of a military career. Such a study should be comprehensive, considering the proper training of both competent and problem writers. It should address the need for diagnostic testing at each level of army schooling. The British Army's practice of "winter essays" in which young officers write papers for their commanders during the slack training periods in the winter might be considered as an appropriate method to monitor an officer's writing when he is not in a school program. The Draft Report of the Army Writer's Conference at Fort Leavenworth is an excellent source for study of a model system for officer writing development.

2. A study should be conducted to determine the proper principles and techniques of managing writers so that a course could be conducted on that topic at CGSC. This study should consider the experiences of civilian industry and should address the causes of the problems identified in this study. The study should also consider proper methods of grading academic papers since many army officers will be future senior instructors.

3. A study of CGSC students in the 1975-1976 Regular Course should be conducted to supplement this study. Such an investigation should administer the CGSC survey and a diagnostic test to the same group to correlate perceptions and attitudes with actual writing performance.

4. Student officers at the Army War College should be surveyed to determine attitudes and perceptions of officers after they have served in high-level staff positions and have been managers of staff writers.

5. A study of the writing training and competence of West

Point graduates should be conducted to determine why the West Pointers in the CGSC survey expressed greater writing competency and significantly less condemnation of their writing education than the other officers in the survey group. The fact that the West Point graduates were the only respondents in the survey who received their writing education at the college level from active army officers in uniform should be considered for its possible psychological implications.

EPILOGUE

> Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these bad habits one can think more clearly . . . . The fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.
>
> George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"

ENDNOTES

Chapter I

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2. There have been many articles in military publications addressing this problem. They include: LTC Pendleton Hogan, "Pentagonese," Collier's, November 24, 1951, pp. 32-33; CPT William Hocker, "Clear as a Cloudy Day," Armor, July-August, 1967, pp. 34-36; William V. Kennedy, "Army Studies Need Not Be Dull," Army, June, 1969, pp. 33-36; Brigadier General (Retd.) Stephen M. Mellnik, "Effective Communication for Commanders and Staff Officers," Infantry, November-December, 1970, pp. 36-41; Robert G. Weaver, "Meet General Bafflegab, Chief of Obfuscation," Army, July, 1973, pp. 33-36; and Argus J. Tresidder, "On Gobbledygook," Military Review, August, 1974, pp. 16-24.

3. J. H. Cushman, Major General, "Writing Instruction at CGSC," Memorandum for Deputy Commandant, 6 September 1974.

4. U. S. Congress, Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Pearl Harbor Attack, Hearing, 79th Congress, 1st Session, January 15-21, 1945 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 2511-2526.

5. Aleksei Tolstoi, cited by Colonel I. Degtyarev, "Command Language," translated from Military Herald(USSR) Number 8, 1973 in Military Review, August 1974, p. 29.

6. Donald M. Murray, "Why Teach Writing and How?", English Journal. December 1973, pp. 1234-1237.

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APPENDIX A

CGSC SURVEY

1. What is your rank?

A. 03	26.4%
B. 04 (less than 3 years in grade)	16.2%
C. 04 (more than 3 years in grade)	48.5%
D. 05	9.0%

2. How did you receive your commission?

A. OCS	20.4%
B. ROTC	50.9%
C. USMA	19.8%
D. Other	9.0%

3. Do you fit into any of the following categories: AG branch, JAG branch, Intelligence Officer speciality, Information Officer speciality, or any other area with heavier than normal writing requirements?

A. Yes	21.0%
B. No	79.0%

4. Do you feel that you received adequate writing instructions in high school/college?

A. Yes	61.1%
B. No	38.9%

5. Do you have difficulty expressing yourself in writing or speaking?

A. Yes, I have some difficulty in both.	22.3%
B. Only in writing.	10.2%
C. Only in speaking.	14.5%
D. No, I have no difficulty in either.	53.0%

Note: All percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding off of numbers.

6. If you had to choose one area of writing in which you felt you needed improvement, which would you choose?

A. None, I'm a competent writer.	17.5%
B. Spelling and punctuation.	21.1%
C. Choice of words.	19.1%
D. Grammar.	9.0%
E. Organization.	33.1%

7. Would you rather write the plans for a military operation or supervise the execution of the same operation?

A. Write.	15.0%
B. Supervise.	85.0%

8. Have you ever mentioned writing ability or deficiency in the narrative of OERs you have written on subordinates?

A. Yes	44.9%
B. No	46.7%
C. I don't remember.	8.4%

9. How have your bosses generally rated your writing ability?

A. No mention has ever been made in my OER narratives.	16.8%
B. Outstanding.	55.1%
C. Above average.	26.4%
D. Average	1.8%
E. Below average.	0.0%
F. Poor.	0.0%

10. Do you feel that your ability, or lack of ability, to write will affect your career?

A. Yes, to a great degree.	46.7%
B. Maybe, to some degree.	38.9%
C. It will have little or no affect.	14.4%

Answers 11 through 16 will require you to rank-order those ENVIRONMENTAL factors which most adversely affected your military writing before you came to CGSC. Using the letters "A" through "F" put "A" next to the most harmful factor and the rest of the letters in descending order to "F" as the least harmful. Use each letter once. A space is provided on this sheet to make it easier to transcribe your ranking to the answer sheet.

Example: What factors most adversely affect your well being today?

B Hangover (next most harmful)
A Cold classroom (most harmful)
C Answering a survey (least harmful)

		A	B	C	D	E	F
11.	Lack of time to write properly.	39.6%	26.8%	15.2%	6.7%	6.7%	4.9%
12.	No quiet place at work to write.	19.4%	26.1%	15.8%	7.9%	13.3%	17.6%
13.	Few opportunities to get experience in writing during my career.	16.4%	11.6%	17.7%	18.3%	24.4%	17.7%
14.	The military education system did not adequately prepare me to write.	9.2%	15.4%	20.3%	28.8%	19.0%	7.4%
15.	There were no experts or editors to turn to for advice.	11.5%	15.2%	27.9%	24.9%	13.3%	6.7%
16.	I changed jobs so often that I rarely could learn the standards expected in the organization.	8.0%	8.6%	12.9%	12.9%	20.3%	37.4%

Answers 17 through 20 ask you to rank-order MANAGEMENT factors which might have adversely affected your military writing. Rank-order these in the same way, only now just use the letters "A" through "D" with "A" as the most harmful factor.

		A	B	C	D
17.	My bosses often changed or criticized what I wrote, no matter now much effort I put into it.	12.2%	16.5%	26.2%	45.1%
18.	My bosses rarely gave me specific instructions to tell me what they wanted me to write.	38.7%	22.7%	25.8%	12.9%

		A	B	C	D	E	F
19.	My bosses were more concerned with writing style and mechanics than with clear communication of ideas.	21.3%	33.5%	34.2%	11.0%		
20.	I knew that there were certain "buzz words" I should use in all my writing for the boss.	22.6%	30.5%	15.9%	31.2%		

Please rank-order this final group, PERSONAL factors, in the same way by using letters "A" through "F" for answers 21-26.

21.	I don't like to put important decisions down in writing for someone to criticize later on.	5.6%	8.6%	16.1%	21.0%	16.7%	32.1%
22.	I often use inflated language to impress my reader and give authority to my writing.	13.6%	24.7%	21.6%	16.1%	13.0%	11.1%
23.	I have difficulty focusing on the reader of my writing because so many people review it before it goes out.	28.8%	25.2%	22.7%	10.4%	6.8%	6.1%
24.	I avoid writing to avoid criticism of my writing ability.	8.0%	6.2%	18.5%	22.8%	27.8%	16.7%
25.	I feel that I cannot safely "Say it like it is!" in my writing.	29.2%	24.2%	14.3%	8.7%	11.8%	11.8%
26.	I simply haven't had much experience in writing.	12.9%	10.4%	12.3%	12.3%	19.6%	32.5%

Now rank the general categories of ENVIRONMENT, MANAGEMENT, PERSONAL in order of their adverse affect on military writing. Use letters "A" through "C", with "A" representing the category which includes the most harmful factors.

		A	B	C
27.	ENVIRONMENT	39.6%	34.8%	24.4%
28.	MANAGEMENT	42.4%	43.6%	13.9%
29.	PERSONAL	17.6%	19.4%	63.0%

30. Have you ever made an above-the-zone promotion list to 04 or 05?

A. Yes 17.4%

B. No 82.0%

31. Are you an army brat?

A. Yes 10.8%

B. No 87.4%

32. What is your present educational level?

A. Less than a bachelor's degree. 3.1%

B. Bachelor's degree. 45.1%

C. Master's degree. 48.8%

D. PhD or Professional degree. 3.1%

APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS

18 November 1974

Dear fellow student,

This survey is an important part of my MMAS study of military writing. For the purpose of this study I define military writing to be the normal written communications of a commander or staff officer: correspondence, reports, plans, directives, staff studies, and evaluations.

Data from this survey will be tabulated and presented to an army-wide writing conference on 3-4 December 1974. If you would like to know more about my study or the results of this survey, contact me in Section 5 or call me at 2314.

Please do not give your name or any identification number on answer sheet. You need only answer the 32 questions; please put only one mark for each question. Use a #2 pencil.

Please put the mark-sense answer sheet in the envelope marked WRITING SURVEY which is tacked on the section bulletin board. I will pick it up at 1500 hours, Thursday, 21 Nov 1974. Please help, I need 100% response for the survey to be valid.

Thank you,

JOHN D. BERGEN
MAJ, SC

Just put your branch in the name block on top of answer sheet and wade in; it will take you about 10-15 minutes.

APPENDIX C

CGSC CLASS COMPARISONS

Analysis of the statistical data collected on the CGSC Regular Courses between 1971 and 1975 demonstrates that the class populations remain similar in most essential aspects. The population distribution of this study's survey sample of 168 officers in the 1974-1975 class is also representative of the population of the entire class. An important correlation considered in this study, for example, is that based on educational level (Table 13). If the class populations remain relatively constant in the future as they have for the past four years, the conclusions of this study should be valid for future groups of CGSC student officers.

All class population statistics presented in this thesis are extracted from U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, "Student Profile 12, 13, 14, 15 Regular Course," 15 August 1974. Non-army officers are not considered in any calculations.

Table 13

Comparison of Army Officers in Survey Group and CGSC Classes by Educational Level. (Numbers in parenthesis represent percentages)

	Ph.D or Professional Degree	Masters Degree	Baccalaureate Degree	No Degree
Survey Group	5(3%)	82(49%)	76(45%)	5(3%)
CGSC 1974/1975	29(3%)	473(48%)	469(48%)	9(1%)
CGSC 1973/1974	29(3%)	443(45%)	491(50%)	20(2%)

Chi-square test shows no significant difference at the .80 level between the survey group and the 1973/1974 CGSC class which was given the diagnostic test.

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